

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A distributed electronic tournament system in which a plurality of remotely located players participate in a tournament through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the tournament, the system comprising:

(a) means for uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central controller via an associated input/output device;

(b) means responsive to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the player to participate in a tournament occurring within a fixed time window via an associated input/output device;

(c) means for accessing a database to store in the database player information that is generated as the player participates in the tournament, such information being available for use in a subsequent tournament, which is administered by said controller and in which the player participates; and

(d) means for awarding the player a prize for achieving a pre-established performance level in the tournament.

2. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:

the system further comprises game software; and

part of the game software resides in the central controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

3. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 2 wherein the part of the game software residing in the input/output device performs bandwidth-intensive functions.

- 1 4. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 input/output device includes secured memory storing tournament-related data.
- 1 5. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 4 wherein the
2 tournament-related data include signals representing time.
- 1 6. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the entry
2 fee for the tournament is based on the amount of time the player participates in the
3 tournament.
- 1 7. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level requires dexterity.
- 1 8. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves answering questions with
3 deterministic answers.
- 1 9. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves prediction.
- 1 10. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 the attainment of
2 the pre-established performance level involves solving puzzles.
- 1 11. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves strategy.
- 1 12. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves chance.

1 21. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the prize
2 for the tournament depends on the number of players participating in the tournament.

1 22. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 number of players in the tournament is restricted to be below a preset value.

1 23. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein a pre-
2 determined number of positions for players are reserved for a selected group of players
3 until the starting time of the tournament is a preset time away, at which time the
4 reserved positions will be made available to all players, including those not within the
5 selected group.

1 24. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the means
2 responsive to payment of an entry fee provides the option for the player to pay before
3 the player participates in the tournament.

1 25. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 24 wherein the
2 means responsive to payment of an entry fee provides the option for the player to enter
3 a password, which is linked to the player's credit card number to automatically charge
4 the entry fee to the credit card account.

1 26. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the means
2 responsive to payment of an entry fee provides a plurality of payment options.

1 27. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 26 wherein the
2 means responsive to payment of an entry fee:
3 stores the payment option selected by the player in the tournament; and
4 automatically activates that option after the player has been identified in a
5 subsequent tournament.

1 29. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 28 wherein each
2 game in the tournament is governed by a set of parameters, whose values change as a
3 function of time.

1 30. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes at least one game; and
3 that game is based on a contemporaneous live event.

1 31. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes a plurality of games; and
3 each player participates in a plurality of games.

1 32. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 there are a plurality of games in the tournament;
3 a number of games have different game formats;
4 different players are involved in games in different game formats;
5 the outcomes of the games are statistically normalized to facilitate comparison
6 among different game formats; and
7 the players in games in different game formats compete against each other to
8 win common prizes.

1 33. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 8 wherein the
2 system keeps track of the amount of time the player participates in the tournament.

1 34. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 player has to complete a qualifying event before the player can participate in the
3 tournament.

1 35. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 34 wherein the
2 system determines if a player is eligible to participate in a subsequent tournament based
3 on the results of the player's participation in the present tournament.

1 36. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 difficulty level of the tournament is adjusted as the tournament is played.

1 37. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes games; and
3 the games in the tournament are based on a recently concluded event.

1 38. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 input/output device comprises a screen having multiple windows thereon, with one
3 window displaying the tournament in which the associated player is currently
4 participating.

1 39. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 38 further
2 comprising means for the player to enter preferences which determine the size of the
3 window displaying the tournament.

1 40. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes payment information.

1 41. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes the player's performance information.

1 42. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes the player's preferences.

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43. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system in which a plurality of remotely located players participate in a tournament having multiple game sessions through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the tournament, the system comprising:

(a) means for uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central controller via an associated input/output device;

(b) means responsive to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the player to participate in a particular game session occurring within a fixed time window via an associated input/output device;

(c) means for determining whether the player has been qualified to advance to a subsequent game session, in which at least one player is eliminated from the previous game session;

(d) means for awarding the player a prize for being qualified to advance to a subsequent game session; and

(e) means for permitting each player qualified to a subsequent game session to participate in that game session.

44. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein a database associated with the central controller manages the game sessions, said database containing information on individual players.

45. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein:

the system further comprises game software; and

for each game session, part of the game software resides in the central controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

46. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein each input/output device includes secured memory storing game-session-related data.

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1 47. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 46
2 wherein the game-session-related data include signals representing time.

1 48. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 46
2 wherein the game-session-related data include payment information.

1 49. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein the game session time window has a fixed end time.

1 50. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein the game session time window has a fixed start time.

1 51. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 50
2 further comprising means for notifying players who have registered for a game session
3 that the game session is about to start.

1 52. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein the number of players in a game session is restricted to be below a preset
3 value.

1 53. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein a pre-determined number of positions for players are reserved for a selected
3 group of players until the starting time of the game session is a preset time away, at
4 which time the reserved positions will be made available to all players, including those
5 not within the selected group.

1 54. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein the means for a player to pay an entry fee provides a plurality of payment
3 options.

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1 55. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 54
2 wherein the means for a player to pay an entry fee:
3 stores the payment option selected by a player in a previous game session; and
4 automatically activates that option after the player has been identified.

1 56. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein:
3 a game session includes at least one game; and
4 the game sessions are based on a contemporaneous live event.

1 57. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein:
3 there are a plurality of games in a game session;
4 a number of games have different game formats;
5 different players are involved in games having different game formats;
6 the outcomes of the games are statistically normalized to facilitate comparison
7 among different game formats; and
8 the players in games in different game formats compete against each other to
9 win common prizes.

1 58. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein each player has to complete a qualifying event before the player can participate
3 in a game session.

1 59. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 58
2 wherein the system determines if a player is eligible to participate in a game session
3 based on the results of the player's past participation.

60. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein the difficulty level of a game session is adjusted as the game session is played.

61. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein:

a game session includes games; and

the games in the game session are based on a recently concluded event.

62. A method of using a distributed electronic tournament system in which a plurality of remotely located players participate in a tournament through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the tournament, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central controller via an associated input/output device;

(b) responding to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the player to participate in a tournament occurring within a fixed time window via an associated input/output device;

(c) accessing a database to store in the database player information that is generated as the player participates in the tournament, such information being available for use in a subsequent tournament, which is administered by said controller and in which the player participates; and

(d) awarding the player a prize for achieving a pre-established performance level in the tournament.

63. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:

the system further comprises game software; and

part of the game software resides in the central controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

1 64. A method as recited in claim 63 wherein the part of the game software residing in
2 the input/output device performs bandwidth-intensive functions.

1 65. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein each input/output device includes secured
2 memory storing tournament-related data.

1 66. A method as recited in claim 65 wherein the tournament-related data include
2 signals representing time.

1 67. A method as recited in claim 65 wherein the tournament-related data include
2 payment information.

1 68. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the entry fee for the tournament is based
2 on the amount of time the player participates in the tournament.

1 69. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level requires dexterity.

1 70. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves answering questions with deterministic answers.

1 71. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves prediction.

1 72. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves solving puzzles.

1 73. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves strategy.

1 74. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves chance.

1 75. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the pre-established performance level
2 includes the amount of time required to achieve that level.

1 76. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein solutions to problems posed in
2 tournaments are not deterministic and evaluating them requires judgment.

1 77. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the tournament time window has a fixed
2 end time.

1 78. A method as recited in claim 77 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level requires dexterity.

1 79. A method as recited in claim 77 further comprising the step of notifying players
2 who are participating in the tournament that the tournament is about to end.

1 80. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the tournament time window has a fixed
2 start time.

1 81. A method as recited in claim 80 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves answering questions with deterministic answers.

1 82. A method as recited in claim 80 further comprising the step of notifying players
2 who have registered for the tournament that the tournament is about to start.

1 83. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the prize for the tournament depends on
2 the number of players participating in the tournament.

1 84. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the number of players in the tournament
2 is restricted to be below a preset value.

1 85. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein a pre-determined number of positions for
2 players are reserved for a selected group of players until the starting time of the
3 tournament is a preset time away, at which time the reserved positions will be made
4 available to all players, including those not within the selected group.

1 86. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides the option for the player to pay before the player participates in the
3 tournament.

1 87. A method as recited in claim 86 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides the option for the player to enter a password, which is linked to the player's
3 credit card number to automatically charge the entry fee to the credit card account.

1 88. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides a plurality of payment options.

1 89. A method as recited in claim 88 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 includes the steps of:
3 storing the payment option selected by the player in the tournament; and
4 automatically activating that option after the player has been identified in a
5 subsequent tournament.

1 90. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein there are a plurality of games in the
2 tournament and the games are different.

1 91. A method as recited in claim 90 wherein each game in the tournament is governed
2 by a set of parameters, whose values change as a function of time.

1 92. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:
2 the tournament includes at least one game; and
3 that game is based on a contemporaneous live event.

1 93. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:
2 the tournament includes a plurality of games; and
3 each player participates in a plurality of games.

1 94. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:
2 there are a plurality of games in the tournament;
3 a number of games have different game formats;
4 different players are involved in games in different game formats;
5 the outcomes of the games are statistically normalized to facilitate comparison
6 among different game formats; and
7 the players in games in different game formats compete against each other to
8 win common prizes.

1 95. A method as recited in claim 68 wherein the system keeps track of the amount of
2 time the player participates in the tournament.

1 96. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein each player has to complete a qualifying
2 event before the player can participate in the tournament.

1 97. A method as recited in claim 96 wherein the system determines if a player is
2 eligible to participate in a subsequent tournament based on the results of the player's
3 participation in the present tournament.

1 98. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the difficulty level of the tournament is
2 adjusted as the tournament is played.

1 99. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:

2 the tournament includes games; and

3 the games in the tournament are based on a recently concluded event.

1 100. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein each input/output device comprises a

2 screen having multiple windows thereon, with one window displaying the tournament

3 in which the associated player is currently participating.

1 101. A method as recited in claim 100 further comprising the step of entering by the

2 player preferences which determine the size of the window displaying the tournament.

1 102. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes payment

2 information.

1 103. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes the

2 player's performance information.

1 104. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes the

2 player's preference.